

Boucher Helps Dedicate New O Winston Link Memorial (October 7, 2006)

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Dedication of the O. Winston Link Memorial

October 7, 2006

Green Cove, Virginia

It is my great pleasure to join with you to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of O. Winston Link's celebrated photograph "Maud Bows to the Virginia Creeper," which was taken here at Green Cove Station fifty years ago today.

During the 1950s, O. Winston Link photographed the last generation of Norfolk & Western Railroad steam engines, including a number of photographs taken along the Abingdon Branch, or Virginia Creeper Railroad, which extended from Abingdon to North Carolina.

Link's interest in this stretch of railroad is understandable. With dozens of wooden trestles, the rail line offered excellent vistas of mountain scenery. While the Virginia Creeper Railroad was operating, it was the highest rail line east of the Rockies, and the railroad station at Whitetop was the depot with the highest elevation in the eastern United States.

The railroad was chartered in 1887 to carry iron and timber from the mountains beyond Damascus. In 1918, when The Norfolk and Western Railway purchased the line, it reached for 75 miles from Abingdon to Elkland, North Carolina. The Virginia Creeper also served as a passenger train and ran at least weekly until 1976. Of particular historical interest, the train carried First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt as a passenger during the 1930's.

In the late 1970's The Norfolk and Western decided to end the run of the Virginia Creeper, and farsighted leaders in the Town of Abingdon, led by Dr. French Moore, and in Damascus, led by then Mayor Joe Bert Rhea, purchased the right of way to establish the trail path which has become one of Washington County's most visited attractions.

Today, the Virginia Creeper Trail remains one of the premiere scenic and recreational attractions of our region, with an annual visitation in excess of 150,000 individuals who use it for hiking, jogging, horseback riding, cross country skiing and bicycling.

The number of people visiting the Virginia Creeper Trail increases each year, and it has been featured in scores of regional and national publications. Many people travel to Washington and Grayson Counties for the purpose of visiting the Virginia Creeper Trail and stay in our community for several additional days to explore other attractions within the

region. The Creeper Trail contributes richly to the tourism economies of Abingdon and Damascus as well as the community of Whitetop.

The most visited site along the Virginia Creeper Trail is Green Cove Station, where we gather this afternoon to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Link's famous photograph, "Maud Bows to the Virginia Creeper." It is easy to see why Link's depiction of the Station has become one of his most famous works.

The Green Cove Station serves as an information center for visitors to the Trail; however, the structure, which was built in 1914 and is the only authentic train station that remains along the Trail, does not have central heating and air conditioning.

Last year, I announced a provision of federal funding in the amount of \$80,000 which will be used to install heating and air conditioning systems at the Station. These new heating and cooling systems will be installed in an appropriate manner to protect the historic character of the building.

Today we celebrate another enhancement to the Green Cove Station, the new Link Memorial. The Memorial has been placed in the exact location where O. Winston Link's camera would have been placed to take the photograph and includes an etching of the image of this photograph along with its history. This addition to the Green Cove Station will allow visitors to capture the scene today from the spot where Link stood 50 years ago and will ensure that the Station will continue to be a popular stop for visitors along the Trail.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize a number of individuals who deserve our thanks for the success we celebrate today.

Chris Johnson, Parks and Recreation Director for the Town of Abingdon, deserves our credit today for his leadership of the fund raising effort for the memorial.

Steve Galyean also deserves thanks today. Steve convened the organizing committee for this effort and was an active participant until he left his job as Abingdon's Director of Tourism to become Director of Tourism Development for the Virginia Tourism Corporation in Richmond.

I also want to extend thanks to the Town Councils of Abingdon and Damascus for their support of this project.

Finally, I would like to thank Skip Blackburn for his tireless efforts on behalf of Green Cove, and the other members of the Link Memorial committee for their work in support of this project.

The Link Memorial is an excellent enhancement to the Green Cove Station, and I am pleased to celebrate with you today the enduring image of "Maud Bows to the Virginia Creeper."